

Statement of John Sammon
Assistant Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
Subcommittee on National Security, Homeland Defense, and Foreign Operations
July 13, 2011

Good morning, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member Tierney and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) mandate and responsibility regarding perimeter security at U.S. commercial airports.

As you know, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) (Pub.L. 107-71), enacted on November 19, 2001, authorized TSA to work with U.S. airport operators to strengthen security at access and critical control points at Federalized airports in the United States to ensure the security of passengers and aircraft.

While TSA's aviation security standards, established through regulations and security directives, provide a foundation for a comprehensive national aviation security program, the unique footprint, location and requirements of each airport require each facility to have its own airport security program (ASP). Each ASP incorporates specific security elements including perimeter security measures, addressing the prevention and detection of the unauthorized entry, presence and movement of individuals and vehicles into and within secured areas and Airport Operations Areas (AOA).

In addition to ASPs, federal and local partnerships are key to screening and inspecting individuals, goods, property, vehicles and other equipment before they enter a secured area or AOA. These partnerships are critical for reducing security vulnerabilities while strengthening our resilience against terrorist attacks.

TSA also conducts ongoing and comprehensive airport inspections to enhance security and mitigate risk associated with perimeter integrity, including Joint Vulnerability Assessments,

Special Emphasis Inspections, and the testing of access control processes at airports. TSA analyzes the results of these inspections and assessments to develop mitigation strategies that enhance an airport's security posture, and to determine if any changes are required. TSA also works in collaboration with airport operators to identify effective practices across the industry regarding access control and perimeter security.

Preventing Terrorism and Enhancing Security

TSA secures our Nation's commercial airports through a variety of programs. The programs most familiar to the traveling public include passenger screening operations conducted by Transportation Security Officers (TSO) at security checkpoints; cargo screening; and the Secure Flight program, which fulfills a key 9/11 Commission recommendation to implement a uniform watch list matching program for all passengers traveling from, within, or bound for the U.S. against names on government terrorist watch lists.

While these are the most visible or recognized layers of security at our Nation's airports, there are other layers, less obvious to the traveling public, that play an equally important role in safeguarding our Nation against terrorist threats. These additional layers include focusing on preventing and detecting the unauthorized entry, presence and movement of individuals and ground vehicles into, and within, the secured and AOAs of an airport.

TSA's risk-based and intelligence-driven Security Playbook program strengthens the transportation security environment by increasing unpredictability and providing additional layers of security. This program employs security measures at direct access points and airport perimeters and uses a variety of resources and equipment to conduct screening of individuals and vehicles entering the AOA.

Examples of the security measures that may be employed at direct access points and airport perimeters include: vehicles inspections, explosive trace detection (EDT) of individuals and property, enhanced screening, accessible property searches, and ID/media verifications, as well as behavior detection.

TSA's Role in Perimeter Security

As set forth by statute, TSA prescribes regulations for screening or inspecting individuals, goods, property, vehicles and other equipment before entry into the secured area of an airport.

Security access regulations, directives, and procedures safeguard against unauthorized persons having access to aircraft, thereby reducing opportunities for criminal violence, sabotage or other such acts. These safeguards help to ensure the safety and integrity of individuals involved in the aviation domain, including aircraft service providers and those workers involved in catering and passenger amenities onboard aircraft. Similarly, TSA requires security access programs for vendors with direct access to airfields and aircraft.

Perimeter Security is a Shared Responsibility

Unlike checkpoint security, which is carried out exclusively by TSOs, perimeter security for airports' secured areas is a mutual responsibility shared among federal, state, and local government personnel. TSA also depends upon law enforcement personnel and resources provided by the airport authority, state or local government or airport personnel to play a lead role in carrying out perimeter security responsibilities.

TSA works in consultation with airport operators and local law enforcement authorities to deploy personnel to secured areas of an airport, as needed, to counter the risk of criminal violence, air piracy, a risk to air carrier operations, or to address national security concerns.

TSIs and RSIs Conduct Assessments, Test Compliance

To counter the potential risks to perimeter security, TSA deploys Transportation Security Inspectors (TSI) to determine whether airport operators are complying with all aspects of TSA regulations and the airport's ASP, as well as to provide strategic oversight regarding an airport's compliance status. The collaborative effort between TSA and the airport results in security enhancements to the airport and, where appropriate, amendments to the airport's ASP.

TSIs conduct comprehensive airport and air carrier assessments, test for compliance regarding access control and perimeter integrity requirements, and conduct surveillance regarding a variety of security processes. When necessary, they can impose civil penalties where repeated or egregious instances of noncompliance with regulations and security procedures are found.

Just as TSOs focus their efforts toward securing a specific physical location, such as a security checkpoint, TSIs focus their assessments on security throughout the airport environments, ranging from the curbside of the airport to the outermost perimeter fence along the edge of the airport property. Regional Security Inspectors (RSIs) located at TSA headquarters also conduct annual and periodic oversight assessments of inspection activity for air carrier and airport facilities at Category X, I, and II airports.

Special Emphasis Assessment and Inspection

Earlier this year, TSA's Office of Security Operations-Compliance Programs initiated a Special Emphasis Assessment (SEA) and a Special Emphasis Inspection (SEI) of all Category X and Category I through IV airports, evaluating perimeter security, including fencing, non-fenced man-made barriers, natural barriers, closed-circuit television, electronic intrusion and motion detection devices, and other barriers. Assessments are complete for all Category X and I airports, with remaining airports expected by September 30, 2011.

Conclusion

TSA's goal at all times is to maximize transportation security and stay ahead of evolving terrorist threats while protecting passengers' privacy, and facilitating the efficient flow of travelers and legitimate commerce. TSA's airport perimeter security initiatives are one part of that comprehensive effort. I want to thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with you today and I am pleased to answer any questions you might have.